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devil's due publishing

HOW TO SELF-PUBLISH COMICS

...NOT JUST CREATE THEM

Vol. 4 of 4: Hit the Pavement!

By Josh Blaylock

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INTRODUCTION

IF YOU'VE BEEN READING THIS SERIES, you've followed my essays on building your infrastructure, signing a creative team, and marketing, but hopefully you realized one thing: it doesn't stop there!

Unless your only goal was to publish a one-shot comic or manga to fulfill a longtime dream, and now you're content, you're going to need to continue marketing the heck out of your publication. If you published a one-shot title to get noticed by bigger publishers, it's time to start promoting yourself to those companies and their editors. And of course, if you're publishing a series of books there are more issues to produce, and more readers to introduce your comic to, and no time to waste—so let's get rollin'.

This issue focuses on convention promotion. If you'd like more specific information on marketing, please see volume III of this series, "Marketing and Production," available at comic shops and at www.devilsduestore.com.

In the first issue of *How to Self-Publish Comics*, I posed the question, "why are you doing this?" Just as it's important to ask yourself about publishing, it's important to do the same for conventions. Many self-publishers make convention attendance a priority without truly discerning the reasons behind going.

CHAPTER FOUR:
HIT THE PAVEMENT!

MY FIRST BIG "CON"

MY FIRST MAJOR CONVENTION experience was the 1995 Chicago Comicon. This was two years before Wizard World took over, and a year before I published my first comic book. I had just graduated from high school, and had already encountered my fair share of shysters in the comics biz. Just a couple years earlier everyone was selling comics hand over fist, so many people who had no idea what they were doing jumped into the publishing game. Many of them even made money despite themselves.

I was by no means skilled enough to be professionally published yet, but didn't know that then (or care to wait until I was better), so I jumped at the opportunity to talk to any publisher I could. Most of my interactions with publishers ended with the discovery that they knew even less about the business than I did. Still, I would devour a few more pieces of information in my quest to get my comics out to the world.

Just before the 1995 Chicago Comicon, I had a serious lead on a hot indy publisher. They liked one of my ideas, and wanted to talk. I didn't let my $400 Volkswagen Rabbit stop me, either. If my engine couldn't get me there, I'd do it on faith… or something.

My friend Jerry came along for the ride, and I was so excited I went ahead and left at about 11 PM, figuring I'd drive through the night. It's a miracle we made it alive, because my headlights at the time had what I called the "Ninja Hunter" feature, preferring to illuminate the treetops rather than the road in front of me.

The engine's deficiencies won out over will-power, and we broke down about two hours outside of Cincinnati, in the middle of Indiana. A guy named Harley was nice enough to give us a lift, and call in a tow truck for us. We opted for sleeping in the

It's a miracle we made it alive, because my headlights at the time had what I called the "Ninja Hunter" feature, preferring to illuminate the treetops rather than the road in front of me.

booth of a 24 hour restaurant rather than a hotel (money doesn't grow on trees, especially when you're 18), after which he was nice enough to pick us up again at 6:00 AM, when he got off of work.

Upon our arrival, we found the auto body shop still closed for the night, so we waited for another three or four hours. Then, finally speaking to a mechanic, I was told, and I quote, "ever'body 'round here drives mostly Fords 'n' Chevys. We don't really work on no foreign cars."

I was at the end of my rope. I somehow convinced him to look at the car, and long story short, we were on the road about 4 or 5 hours later. So, what should have been a 6-hour trip became a 22-hour monumental task, but we made it.

The actual convention part of the trip was cut down to a half day, but I managed to meet with the aforementioned publisher, and a couple weeks later we had a deal! Over the next couple of months I drove to every small convention in a 200 mile radius, printed ***ashcans*** (a small preview comic book, about half the size of regular comics, usually printed at a copy center), and along with my writing partner, pimped the hell out of that comic.

So why am I telling this story? Because shortly thereafter, I got a phone call from the publisher saying that they weren't going to publish the book. That it really wasn't very good, and not up to par for them. "But you've seen it," I said. "You've known what it looked like for months." The company completely burned us, and that's when I said, "screw it, I'm doing this myself." I made the conscious decision to enter the world of self-publishing.

WHAT'S A COMICON?

So what exactly is a COMICON?

It's hard for me to fathom, but I've been exhibiting at comic book conventions, or comicons, for over a third of my life. Some of you may have only seen them as parodied in film and television. Well, the first thing to get out of the way is that *NOT EVERYONE WEARS COSTUMES*. Some are more of a... well, a "nerdfest" than others, but most have expanded to include exhibitors from video game and toy companies, creating an entire "pop culture" experience.

A comicon is usually held in a large hall in a convention center or hotel, and houses displays from various comic book publishers, as well as tables where artists set up examples of their work and draw and sell sketches for the fans. It's one of the only industries that allows fans to meet its "celebrities" face to face, and take a piece of the industry home with them in the form of original art and autographs.

Some of the publishers are there to give away promotional posters and materials, while others sell comics from their entire catalog of titles.

Half of the shows are usually reserved for comic book retailers that set up spaces to sell new and old titles, toys, t-shirts, and pretty much anything else you can imagine.

Conventions typically range from one to three days in length. San Diego's Comicon, the largest of all, is four and one half days. The price of admission for conventions can be anywhere from a few bucks, to over sixty dollars depending on what package an attendee buys, and the size and scope of the show.

NETWORKING

PROBABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT EFFECT convention attendance can have for your business is the amount of contacts you make. Relationships developed online or over the telephone pale in comparison to face to face contact. This is where you can meet the hundreds of talented creators that make the industry tick, and even become close friends with many of them.

There's an energy at conventions, a sort of instant bonding that happens between people. It's one of the few times that everyone is linked by a common interest – everyone knows what happens on Wednesdays (for the layman, that's when new comic books hit the shelves)! I've often chatted with friends about how strange it is that you can meet someone at a convention just once, and by the next show you're crashing in their hotel room, and it's like you've known each other forever.

That's the networking that happens naturally, but you also need to make a concerted effort to meet people, pass out your business card to those you chat with, and just get to know people who make comic books for a living. You'll also meet dozens of self-publishers in the same boat as yourself, and you can trade thoughts and ideas, and talk with others who understand where you're coming from.

It used to drive me crazy that I had a hard time getting to shows on Fridays; I had to work my day job, and had to speed off early on Sundays to get back in time for work. I was so envious of everyone who just got to stay an extra day, because it was their job. It was a great feeling to finally take that next step. Nowadays, Devil's Due has to turn down conventions, because there are simply too many to attend.

One of the most important things to do once you've made your initial contacts is follow-up. As you'll find, the more conventions you attend, the harder it is not to lose things on the trip home. This goes double for big publishers. When a convention is

Don't ever feel jilted if someone loses your information and never follows up with you: simply make an effort to **be the person who keeps his or her collected information**, and makes the first contact.

over, displays and inventory must be broken down and shipped in a very short amount of time, and it's very chaotic. Don't ever feel jilted if someone loses your information and never follows up with you: simply make an effort to be the person who *does* keep his or her collected information, and makes the first contact.

VISIBILITY & CUSTOMER AWARENESS

ANOTHER BENEFIT OF CONVENTIONS IS, of course, interacting with hundreds, if not thousands of potential fans all in one room. There is nowhere else that you can find so many people that fall into your target market. You get to interact face to face with fans, sign comics, draw sketches, and of course, sell your merchandise.

Greater than that, though, is the ability to make sure that everyone simply notices you, and by you I mean your product. Whether they buy it at the show or not, you want them to walk away with your branding etched into their minds. That can make all of the difference when someone is perusing the racks at their local comic book store two months later, and they notice something familiar about your book, sitting on the rack. This is why you need to make sure you have an easy to read, eye-catching logo and image designed into your booth set-up. Let's imagine that you're attending a con (as we call them in the industry) with an attendance of 20,000 people. You can't expect all 20,000 attendees to buy your comics, but you should think of that as the equivalent of being able to advertise a full-page ad in a magazine with a 20,000 copy circulation. This is what I mean by "visibility."

Even if they don't buy a comic, try to make sure that everyone gets something. It may be a flyer, postcard, or sticker that directs them to your website. Check the previous volume of this series to find out more about marketing directly to the customers. I do *not* recommend giving away candy, as people tend to focus on the sweets, and not your comics.

You also have the chance to increase your visibility by advertising in the convention program pamphlets, or by sponsoring parties or auctions the organizers might set up. This can be pricey, but depending on the size of the show, and the flexibility of the management, you may be able to negotiate something that works within your budget.

When working with the convention organizers, always remember that running a show is

extremely taxing on the brain, and coordinators are usually trying to appease ten people at a time. Just be patient, and state clearly if you have a problem while remaining very polite. That sounds like the obvious tip of the week, but so many people lose their cool in the chaos of setting up for a convention.

The last category in which you have a chance to score "visibility points" is the press. Many of the online comic book news and fan sites send reporters to all the major shows, and they're always looking for material. If you are fortunate enough to pass a review copy along to a reporter, or land an interview on, say, Newsarama.com, you just increased your visibility from 20,000 people to upwards of 100,000.

I guess what I'm saying is that you need to always think of the big picture, and not just get caught up in where you are right at that moment. That doesn't mean every convention is great, but you can get a lot out of a good

MEETINGS

A LOT OF THE SUCCESS YOU HAVE AT a convention revolves around the planning you do before the show, even moreso than the activities during show itself. I mentioned press just a while ago; although you will often stumble upon opportunities by luck, try to contact reporters a couple of weeks prior to a con, and arrange to be formally interviewed. This way, you are guaranteed press, and you have time to find out what images or information would appeal the most to a particular journalist.

This is also a great opportunity to meet artists, writers, and anyone else you've been dealing with via the internet or over the phone. As I've said before, nothing compares to a face to face meeting, and conventions are where many relationships are formed.

Look closely at the programming. Is anyone from your distributor going to be there? Anyone from your printing company? Distributors and printers usually only attend very large shows, but you don't want to miss the opportunity to meet them. When you get outside of the comic book industry, and attend shows that cover other media, these meetings become more important. When I fly to a book industry trade show, I make sure that I have meetings scheduled with my distributor, and the buyers of any large chain stores that will be attending, as an opportunity to sell DDP product. Also, after you've been around for a few years, you'll know so many people that you have to schedule formal meetings just to get anything done.

Try to scope out the convention layout before these appointments so you can determine the best place to meet, away from the chaos of the show where both parties can concentrate and hear each other. At a show like the one in San Diego, this is a challenge,

Meetings are necessary at huge shows because, well, **good luck finding anyone** if you don't have a scheduled appointment and a copy of their booth number.

but most are easy enough to manage.

I have a hard time walking from one end of a convention to another without running into three or four people that I haven't seen in months, who want to say hi. I always try to, but there simply isn't enough time in the weekend to talk to everyone at length. And no, it's not because of my super duper charm, it's simply because I've been around for so damn long. It's always good to be able to excuse yourself for a meeting, where you have time to get down to business. Meetings are also necessary at huge shows like the San Diego Comic-Con International, because, well, good luck finding anyone if you don't have a scheduled appointment and a copy of their booth number.

With that said, it's awesome to know so many people from all over the world, and to have so many buddies under one roof. Some of the coolest experiences of my life have taken place over the span of a convention weekend.

SALES

WHO LIKES TO MAKE MONEY? AH, of course... you do, and a convention is a great way to do it. Before you expect to walk out of the con with a fistful of Benjamins, though, be prepared for the expenses you'll incur as a part of attending the show. Once you add those costs up, you'll know how important it is to make the most of your "table time" when you get to sell to the attendees.

You always want to have a pleasant look on your face, and be nice to every single person that passes your table. Don't let anyone walk by your table and make eye contact without giving them a "what's up?" or "how's it going?" Anything to draw them in. People have a lot to see at a show, and if you don't draw their attention, someone else will. So often I see people sit at their booths, not saying a word to anyone. Sometimes people even come up to the table to peruse art or merchandise, and don't get so much as a "hi." This is completely ridiculous, and if you're too shy to say hello to potential customers, then you should see who else can run your shows for you. You wouldn't hire yourself to print your books without knowing how to run a press, would you? So you don't want to give people a bad vibe at a convention if you're just naturally shy or grumpy. You are the face of your company or comic book.

People go to conventions to have a good time. They paid to be there. When they approach your table, you want them to receive a warm greeting. It's an atmosphere of camaraderie, so be sure and treat everyone as a friend.

I've been told by dozens of people that I'm very hard to read... my face, not my comics. Well, that's an improvement from when people used to always tell me that I looked pissed off. It's just the way my face is built, I guess, but I have to make a serious effort to be conscious of that, especially when I'm speaking with readers or fans, lest they think I'm a grump. Know your strengths

don't be too proud to improve upon the latter.

So, once you manage to snag a potential reader at your table, they're most likely going to ask you what your comic or manga is about. This is where the "hook" comes into play. I focused on the hook in an earlier volume of *How to Self-Publish Comics*. The hook is the very simple, one or two sentence synopsis of your concept, and something that sets it apart from all the other books out there. If you don't have a good hook, you're going to have a lot of trouble earning a fanbase.

For example, the DDP comic book *Kore* is about "a man thrown into the world of Abaddon: a realm of fantasy, home to elves, dwarves, and wizards, where the magic has run dry. Now these creatures must learn to live as we do, and deal with huge changes in their social structure. Yet our protagonist seems to be a pure source of magic, and everyone wants a piece of him." (I'm told by our marketing staff that "tongue-in-cheek fantasy with a fairy strip club" works as an even better hook, but really, is that appropriate for this publication?)

Another idea I'm working on is *Mercy Sparx*, and the hook is: "The book stars Mercy, a devil girl stuck between Heaven and Hell, who is contracted by Heaven to hunt down three rogue angels giving them a bad name. If she succeeds, it may just be her key to the pearly gates."

Those are hooks. Now, maybe you just hate fantasy, and there's nothing I can do to make you like my comic. That will inevitably happen with some people, but if you have a concise hook you can grab people in a split second, and that may be all the time you have.

An easy tactic is comparing your concept to something that is more recognizable. For instance, you could say your book is "like *Lost* meets the *X-Files*" or "*A Christmas Carol* meets *The DaVinci Code*." Whatever makes sense, as long as your references are common knowledge to your demographic.

Reiterating the point that not everyone will like your comic, do *not* be offended if they pass on by. Even if you've been sitting at your table all weekend and haven't sold one comic, don't project your frustrations onto anyone. I see this all the time, and it's pointless. Some people just aren't going to be interested in what you have to offer, no matter how well done it may be… even if it's free!

Don't wait for someone to ask you what your title is about. Perhaps you could ask them if they've ever heard about it? If they haven't, it's a great opportunity to inform them. If they have, then you can go into more detail about your specific offerings.

ROOKIE MISTAKES & PITFALLS

I THINK THE BIGGEST MISTAKE ROOKIE convention exhibitors make is setting their expectations too high. Many walk into a show expecting that everyone is going to like his or her comic or manga, and that sales will be great too. They believe that they will walk away with a fistful of cash in hand, and be off to the next convention. It rarely goes that way. It takes time to perfect your sales tactics, and find what works best for you. It also takes experience in dealing with convention organizers and shipping companies to make sure things go smoothly.

Conventions are also long and tiring, and it's easy to use up all of your energy on the first day. Make sure you bring plenty of water and something to snack on, or that you have enough money to pay for the over-inflated convention center food (I think they get their prices from the future or something). Otherwise you may be getting dizzy in the 7th or 8th hour of the show, especially if you overdid "Bar Con" the night before (I'll explain that fun experience later).

That said, going to your first show is a wonderful experience. It's your first chance to see what real flesh and blood people think of your comic book, not just faceless handles on a message board. People are usually never brutally honest to your face, but you'll know if you're onto something or not just by the response of people coming up to your booth and buying your product, or quickly walking by.

Be sure not to get taken by surprise by expenses that can arise. If you shipped merchandise to a show using Union Workers, you're going to get charged for any shipments brought to your booth unless delivered on a

specific day arranged by the show organizers. Also understand that the convention organizers are not the same organization that is working for the convention center. One is simply renting from the other, so you're dealing with multiple organizations. Lastly, don't forget to remove your geek-badge after the show! In more politically correct terms, that means "remove your exhibitor badge."

MAJOR CONVENTIONS

THE KING OF ALL COMIC CONVENTIONS is the San Diego Comic-Con International. Although it has arguably become more of a "pop culture" con than a comic con, due to all of the movie studios, toy companies and video game industry professionals in attendance, it's still growing every year, and is the show that everyone goes to. If you want to meet the highest caliber of industry pros, this is where you need to go. I'd go so far as to say, if you can only go to one convention all year, make it this one.

Wizard World

Founded by the publisher of *Wizard: The Guide to Comics* magazine, this company has built a pop-culture empire out of their shows. Now spanning across the nation, Wizard World, although pricey, has some of the best comic book conventions in the country. They currently have annual events in Chicago, Philadelphia, LA, and Dallas.

SPX: Small Press Expo

This convention is held once a year in Baltimore, Maryland, and focuses on the alternative side of comics. If you have a mainstream super-hero or fantasy title, this isn't the place to go, but if it's more slice-of-life, this is where you want to be.

APE: Alternative Press Expo

Although I've never attended, I've been told that APE is the West Coast equivalent of SPX, held once a year in California.

Wonder Con

This is another show I've never attended, but if you're on the West Coast, this is one of the larger conventions, held annually in Oakland, California.

Heroes Con

This show is held in Charlotte, North Carolina, and is known for its high caliber of artistic talent and intimate setting, although it's still a large show.

Motor City Con

If you're in the Midwest or NorthEast, the Motor-City Con is one of the old standbys. They usually have a heavy amount of television stars and B-movie guests as well as the regular comic book fair.

Pittsburgh Comicon

I've been doing this show for a decade, and you couldn't encounter a nicer group of convention promoters. If you want to be treated right, despite having no track record in the industry, this is a great show, and it has a solid attendance. Pittsburgh also seems to draw a large horror-movie crowd too for some reason.

Mid-Ohio-Con

A small but fun show in Columbus, that has been going on for about twenty million years. Okay, about twenty. It always runs on the weekend after Thanksgiving, and although I haven't been in a couple of years, it was one of my main stops on the small press circuit. It's usually sponsored by the Laughing Ogre, one of the best comic book shops in the country which hosts a great party every Friday before the show.

There are also a number of smaller conventions throughout the country, probably in your own city. Take time to investigate these, and decide if they are worth your time to attend.

PREPARATION

THE PROCESS OF REGISTERING FOR AND attending a convention can range anywhere from over six months to just a few short weeks. The more popular the show, the earlier you need to reserve your space. Besides the convention itself, you'll need to book hotels and make travel arrangements, and you usually get the best deals by doing so far in advance. In some extreme cases, during the San Diego Comic-Con, hotels open up for availability on a certain day, about six months before the convention, and sell out within a matter of hours.

Regardless, there are a few important steps you must perform when attending any convention.

1. Registration

A simple process of completing application forms for table or booth space and determining how much space you want, and what it will cost. Some conventions insist on money at the time of registration, and others give you more time. Very few, if any, let you wait until the day of the show to pay so be sure to keep an eye on the deadlines.

Many conventions have registration deadlines that hit a few months before the shows, and the closer you get to the show date, the higher the price.

2. Hotel Reservations and Travel Arrangements

Once you have confirmed a space at the convention, the next step is booking your hotel and travel plans. You can actually book your hotel even if you're not sure you'll be attending a show, because you have up until a day or two before the show to cancel the

reservations. You never pay any hotel expenses until the day of check out, so keep that in mind. You don't want to book a show only to find you have no place to sleep, although that's only an issue at the largest conventions.

Plane tickets are different. You're going to need to pay for those immediately, so I advise purchasing them as soon as possible after confirming your placement at a show.
Last is your car rental, if necessary. Again, you don't have to pay for your car rental until the day you return it, so I'd recommend reserving one as soon as you know you may be attending a specific con.

**Indy Small-Budget Trick: If your wallet is especially thin, one simple tactic is to use the cash you've made at the show to pay for your hotel and rental car. You'll still need a credit card to reserve them, but since payment's not due until you're leaving, you can request to pay with cash. Of course, you need to have a "Plan B" if you don't make enough at the show to cover these expenses.*

Your set-up can be as simple as 18x24 posters on easels placed behind you, and a nice table skirt, or it can be as wild as your imagination and budget will allow you to be.

3. Booth Design

I think this is one of the most exciting parts of the convention experience. Designing your booth display is your chance to show off your comic to the world, and make yourself stand out from everyone else.

It's a challenge, because you don't have a lot of space to work with, especially if you're in the small-press area, or what's commonly referred to as "artist alley." Your set-up can be as simple as 18x24 posters on easels placed behind you, and a nice table skirt, or it can be as wild as your imagination and budget will allow you to be. Try attending a decent-sized convention and perusing other booths to get ideas before you attempt to do it on your own. Even today at Devil's Due it's common practice to take pictures of other company booth displays to brainstorm ideas for the following year.

Try to pick a booth display concept that is easily mobile, cheap to transport, and that contains images that you can use for an entire convention season. When I was starting out, I used to carry an elaborate set-up made out of PVC piping and cloth banners, with posters attached. It collapsed down into a big duffle bag and a few flat poster boxes, but it took forever to set up. Then, as Devil's Due grew, we created some extremely complicated booth displays. One was actually made of sheet metal, mesh fencing, and translucent plastic! It looked really cool, but damn if it didn't take hours to set up, and it cost a ton to ship. I had resisted purchasing a professional "pop-up booth," (the curved black back-drops you will see at any show), because they cost anywhere from $2,000 to $3,000, but I was paying more than that in shipping and labor costs. They collapse into two fairly small shipping barrels, with wheels attached for easy transport, and are worth every penny. Now we just build off of the pop-up booth format, and it takes a fraction of the time to set up.

I don't think you need a pop-up booth when you're just starting out, but if you start to grow, or if money's not the issue, I suggest getting one as soon as you can. To find these, check on Ebay for the best deals.

4. Inventory and Supply Planning

The most common mistake new publishers

After a long day at a con, everyone wants to run out to the nearest restaurant or bar, and so will you most likely. Try to make a serious effort to **head back to your hotel room and count your money,** though, before you do.

make is bringing too much inventory to a convention. Sure, it's better to have stock left over than it is to sell out on the first day of the show, but one small box holds a lot of comics. Although big publishers can sell hundreds of certain titles at a show, they often sell less than thirty or forty copies of specific issues.

If it's your first show, it's hard to calculate how many comics you'll need, how many sketches or pages of art you'll sell, or what the reaction to your book is going to be like. Just make your best educated guess, without losing an arm and a leg on shipping expenses, or without carrying around 500 pounds of comic book boxes all weekend, and adjust for the next time.

5. Shipping

Do not be caught off guard by the shipping restrictions and fees at a convention. Be sure to read the paperwork to find out if the show you're attending is fairly lax in their policies, or if they require union participation. This won't be a huge issue for someone publishing one small-press comic, but if you have a skid of boxes being delivered at a show like San Diego, you may be charged as much as a few hundred dollars extra if you don't read the fine print on the rules.

6. Set-Up (supply delivery)

As long as you can set up your display by yourself, or with one other person, you'll be fine at any show. If you get very ambitious, though, and require all kinds of tools and equipment to construct things, you may find a union supervisor assigning someone to help you, whether you want his help or not, all for a nice fee. Again, this is probably NOT an issue for anyone reading this, but it's always good to know.

The next time you're at a show, and you see those huge displays for companies like DC Comics, Sci-Fi Channel, or even Dark Horse, think about the fact that not only did they pay thousands of dollars to reserve the space, but all of that stuff had to be designed, manufactured and shipped, and the companies probably had to pay union help about $50 per person per hour to assemble it.

7. Breakdown

I'm always amazed at the breakdown process at a convention. After three or four days of insanity, walking around huge displays with loud music and flashing lights, no matter how enormous the set-up, it seems like everything disappears in a matter of seconds at the close of the show on the very last day. Within a few hours, this magical wonderland you've just spent the weekend living in will no longer exist. Anyway, my point is that when a show is over, it's time to get yourself in gear and get the heck out of the convention center.

On the days preceding that, though, when the show ends each night, you don't have a lot of time to pack your materials for the night. After a long day at a con, everyone wants to run out to the nearest restaurant or bar, and so will you most likely. Try to make a serious effort to head back to your hotel room and count your money, though, before you do. If you are comfortable doing it at the table, that's fine too, but just be sure to keep an accounting of it so when the show is over you have detailed information about how well the event went for you. It's very easy to spend that wad of cash in your pocket after a few drinks, or picking up the tab for someone else because you're feeling generous, only to discover in the morning that you should have

clung to every penny.

On the final day of breakdown, even if your display doesn't take long to pack up, you're going to have to weave through everyone else that's breaking down and packing up. If you plan to ship materials home, rather than carry them, you'll need to arrange for that beforehand. It's very easy to bring FedEx or UPS forms along, and fill them out after you've packed up your materials, and then deliver them to the nearest drop off location. Most major convention centers and hotels offer FedEx and UPS service, but in the rare case that they don't, you don't want to be stuck driving boxes to a location in a town you're unfamiliar with, and still get to the airport on time (trust me, I know).

8. Resolve Billing Issues

This isn't something you usually need to worry about, but if you run into the situation where you do need to have skids delivered, and are paying the various unions and shipping companies to deliver skids to your booth (these are called *"drayage charges"*), be sure to check whatever credit cards you may have used on the next few statements. Sometimes charges magically appear that you should have never paid. For instance, at Devil's Due, we've flown people out a day early, and paid for the extra man hours and hotel fees just to take advantage of discounts offered if you set up your display on a certain date, only to be charged anyway. This leads to many phone calls pestering customer service managers to give the money back. In the end it usually works out, but causes added frustration. Be on the lookout that you're only paying what you owe.

BAR CON

WHEN YOU ATTEND A CONVENTION as a casual spectator, and you meet the artists, get signatures, and buy a bunch of cool merchandise, you might not know that you're only experiencing half of the con experience. Every convention has another side to it… a fun, and sometimes a little bit seedy phenomenon I like to call "Bar Con" (a phrase coined by DDP's Susan Bishop).

For the artists, retailers, and anyone else working the show floor, the official hours of the convention are only half of the experience. Where everyone really lets their hair down, has a good time, and forms the relationships that last throughout the years are at the dinners, parties, and spontaneous pub crawls that happen in the evenings. This is an industry where very few people work in big offices with dozens of employees to socialize with. Many creators work in their home, or in small studios, and never get to interact with their peers face to face, except at conventions. So when they do, everyone seems to be making up for lost time, playing catch up.

After you've done a full convention season, if you can pull it off, and hung out with the same people in half a dozen cities across the country, it's easy to feel like you've known them for years. I imagine it's a very tiny glimpse of what it's like traveling on a summer concert tour, without all the groupies beating down your door.

To female readers, I say that from a man's perspective, because let's face it, if you're a woman attending these shows, you probably will have to beat guys back with a stick—comparable to some touring rock star.

Be careful not to over-do the Bar Con experience, and lose sight of the fact that this is still business. You have to get up in the morning and make money, so be careful. If you party too much, you may find yourself doing something foolish, and burning bridges in the process, depending on who's around to witness the events. First impressions are the

most important. After you've been around for a few years, then you can make an ass out of yourself.

Seriously, though, let me clarify that this does not mean you have to actually go to parties, do shots and get plastered, but it does mean that you should be interacting with people after the shows. Don't just go hole up in your hotel room every night reading comics that you bought at the show that day. That's fine for the average attendee, but you're trying to network here, so take advantage of it.

If you're serious about breaking into this industry, and you're not taking part in any Bar Con events, I really feel you're missing out.

RETAILER CONTACTS

THE PEOPLE YOU'LL MEET AT BAR CON come from every level of the comic industry ladder, but you need to target each category specifically to maximize your networking. By simply exhibiting, you're hitting your first demographic – the readers. Bar Con is probably the best way to meet artists and writers, aside from scheduled meetings, or simply being their "booth neighbor" all weekend. Retailers are usually in a separate area of the convention than the publishers, though, so you'll need to make extra effort to promote your title to them.

Take note that not every retailer at a convention has a comic book store. Many of them only sell golden or silver age comics (comic books that were published years ago), so they're not going to be interested in buying yours. Look for the displays that are offering modern comics, and keep an eye out for those representing an entire chain of stores. If you don't know who these people are, you'll have to learn by talking to them.

The retailers are usually very busy at these shows, and don't have a lot of time to talk, so keep your discussions short and sweet. Make a small flyer or give them any other simple promotional material you have, or better yet, a sample comic; but don't expect them to manage to take it home. 95% of the time they will *lose* this by the end of the first day, because conventions are crazy. You're only giving it to them so that the next time they see an ad for your book, there's a better chance they'll recognize it, and hopefully place an order. This is why you want to get their business cards or addresses, so that you may follow-up with them later.

CLOSING

WOW, I CAN'T BELIEVE THE LAST ISSUE of this series is finally coming to a close. I really enjoyed writing *How to Self-Publish Comics*, and have been very happy with the response. Hopefully I'll be able to do more of these in the future.

A lot of this is just me rambling on about my experiences over the past ten years, but there were many times that it was more difficult to translate from brain to keyboard than I anticipated. When you've been doing something for so long it's easy to leave important chunks of information out that, although simple, may be imperative to understanding the chain of instructions that follow. I hope I didn't do that to anyone.I also hope I've raised many questions in your minds. There's nothing better than thinking of a question that you previously never even knew you should have asked. When that happens to me, I know it means I'm actually learning something new.

So whether you are a die-hard aspiring self- publisher, or if you're just a casual reader interested in what goes on behind the scenes of this capes-and-tights industry, thanks for checking out the series.

So for those of you who are serious, get out there and start working on your game plan. Just don't do too good of a job and become my competition five years from now.

ANNOUNCING THE SELF-PUBLISHING

HELPING HAND CONTEST!

In celebration of this four-part series, Devil's Due Publishing is holding a contest! The Grand Prize winner will receive a free one-on-one consultation from Josh Blaylock, during his/her self-publishing experience. The consultation consists of half-hour phone calls once a week for two months, as the winner builds an infrastructure, establishes a marketing plan, and sends that first comic book off to the press. Preliminary and follow-up phone calls and emails will be arranged to make the most of the two month consultation period.

What do you need to do?

This isn't an art contest; it's *much much more!* Blaylock not only wants to see your artists' and writers' samples, but your business plan as well. While purchasing *How to Self-Publish Comics* is not necessary to enter, entries will be judged based on the topics discussed in the series. Each entry should include your plan for setting up your infrastructure, signing your creative team, marketing goals, and how you plan to keep the momentum going once your comic book is on the stands.

The contest deadline is not until June 15th, 2006, so please do not rush any submissions. Take your time, and do it right. Submissions will not be viewed until May. The winning entry will be announced by the end of June.

Two runners-up will receive a one-time half-hour consultation session with Blaylock. The grand prize is priceless, but even these one-time sessions can save you hours of time and thousands of dollars that may have been misused without experienced advice.

ENTRIES TO:

Devil's Due Publishing, Inc.
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DEVIL'S DUE NUES

JUNE 2006

LOG ON FOR COMICS!

Here at DDP we're on the internet a *lot*. Are you too? Do you check out the newest release and buzz andpreviews on your favorite creators and projects? Maybe you have something you want to say about a comic book, or just want to see if everyone feels the same way... Without waiting for next month's letter column, you can go online and log in immediately!

Here's a list of some places around the net we suggest you drop by!

www.DevilsDue.net - Get the latest DDP News from the source! Click on our 5 Page Previews of the coming week's DDP releases—that's right, every week; get previews of our books online for FREE!; click on our Events section and find out when DDP will be near you! Plus we frequently do cool flash commercials that you don't want to miss!

www.Newsarama.com - Best place on the net for comic book news and discussion! Make sure and check out the sidebar, with loads of Indie and DDP news! Plus, we've been known to post *way* advance previews on their message boards: so go there and be the first to know!

www.ComicGeekSpeak.com - These guys are the bomb! A regular set of comic book podcasting pimps! The most entertaining thing to listen to on your computer! Have you heard of this podcasting thing yet? You don't need to have an iPod to listen...so check 'em out!

www.myspace.com/devilsdue - Ahh, MySpace. We know you're on there... and we want to be your friend!

www.devilsdue.net/forums/ - Join other DDP fans and readers for exciting discussion about DDP books and upcoming releases!

Lying in the Gutters - The infamous column by ComicBookResources.com's staff writer Rich Johnston. The most amusing perspective in the industry... Hopefully DDP will stay out of there—unless it's something funny like, "What happened at the Pittsburgh Comicon DDP hotel party?!"

WHY AREN'T YOU READING THIS?!

Don't you just *love* penguins? I mean, I *know* you've seen their marching movie–so why not check out these lovable bloopy superhero ones? Three average, teenage hipster penguins are turned to superheroes by a magic hackysack--you gotta love the '90s and **Penguin Bros.**! Plus: you get to see the band GWAR as, well, penguins!

To order from your local comic shop, give them this code: **DEC042520**. Your local book store will want this: **ISBN 1932796207**. And if you want to order from us online you'll go here: www.DevilsDueStore.com. ENJOY!

THE ☑LIST

❑ Family Guy #2 (of 3) ❑ Night Wolf #1 (of 5) ❑ Elsinore #7 (of 9) ❑ Forgotten Realms: Sojourn #3 (of 3) ❑ G.I.Joe: Declassified #1 (of 3) ❑ G.I.Joe #12 ❑ G.I.Joe vs Transformers" The Art of War #4 (of 5) ❑ killer 7 #4

THE ART OF THE PULLBOX

What is a Pull Box?

A Pull Box (aka Pull & Hold Service, Club Membership, Comic Book Subscription Service) is a helpful service most comic shops offer their customers. You provide a list of comics that you want–monthly titles, special orders, whatever you need–and the shop pulls those titles aside for you every week, so you don't miss a single issue. Plus, many shops offer a discount for keeping a pull box!

Your comic shop (and even comic fans) uses *Previews Magazine*, a monthly catalog of comicky goodness listing all of the comics that will be out two months later, so you know what to order for your own pull box. Only comic shops can order directly from *Previews*, but your shop should stock *Previews*, or have a copy available to look through. *Previews* comes out the last Wednesday of every month. DDP has our own section in *Previews* towards the middle (usually about page 250 or so). Look for the red sidebars and DDP logos on our pages!

Once you're signed up, visit www.DevilsDue.net at the end of each month and download the newest Pull Sheet of DDP comics. The DDP Pull Sheet (located at the very top of the site) is a list of all of the DDP books your shop is currently ordering from their comic book distributor. Hit Print on the DDP Pull Sheet, check off the titles you want, then return it to your shop the next week.

Your shop orders their books two months in advance, so it's good to let them know about titles you want right away–and be sure to sign up for your favorite DDP titles!

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–Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

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Had enough Civil Crisis, or whatever it's called this month?

Check out *DEVIL'S DUE's RIPPED-OFFer!*

With *so many* comics coming out from "The Big Two" these days, they *can't* all be great. If you bought a bad book from them, vent your frustrations and ***RIP THE COVER OFF!*** Then send the cover to DDP, and we'll send you a ***FREE BOOK.*** That's right, a free book! It's finally your turn to rip *them* off!

TO PARTICIPATE: Send your name, mailing address, email address, a torn-off comic book cover and 3 comic title preferences, if any (visit www.DevilsDue.net to view titles), to: Devil's Due Publishing, Inc., Attn: Free DDP Comic, 4619 N. Ravenswood #204, Chicago, IL 60640. RULES: The comic cover sent in must have been released in the last 2 months. Covers must be from "The Big Two." If you don't know what that means, we're not going to tell you. Devil's Due may send any DDP comic book with no guarantee of which comic will be sent. No more than one comic per address. Comics will be shipped Media Mail two weeks after the above is received. Ripped-off covers become property of Devil's Due and are non-returnable.

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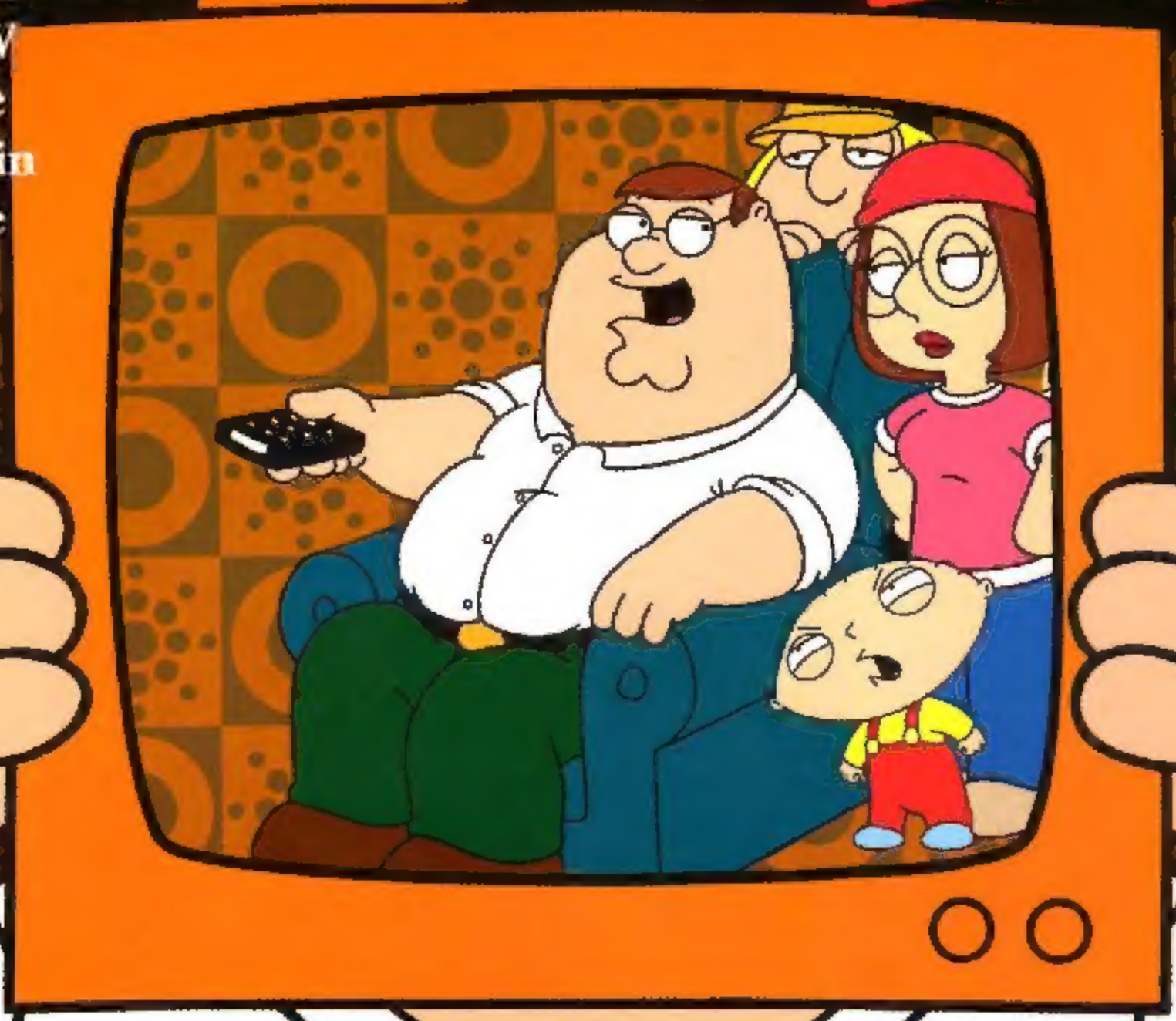

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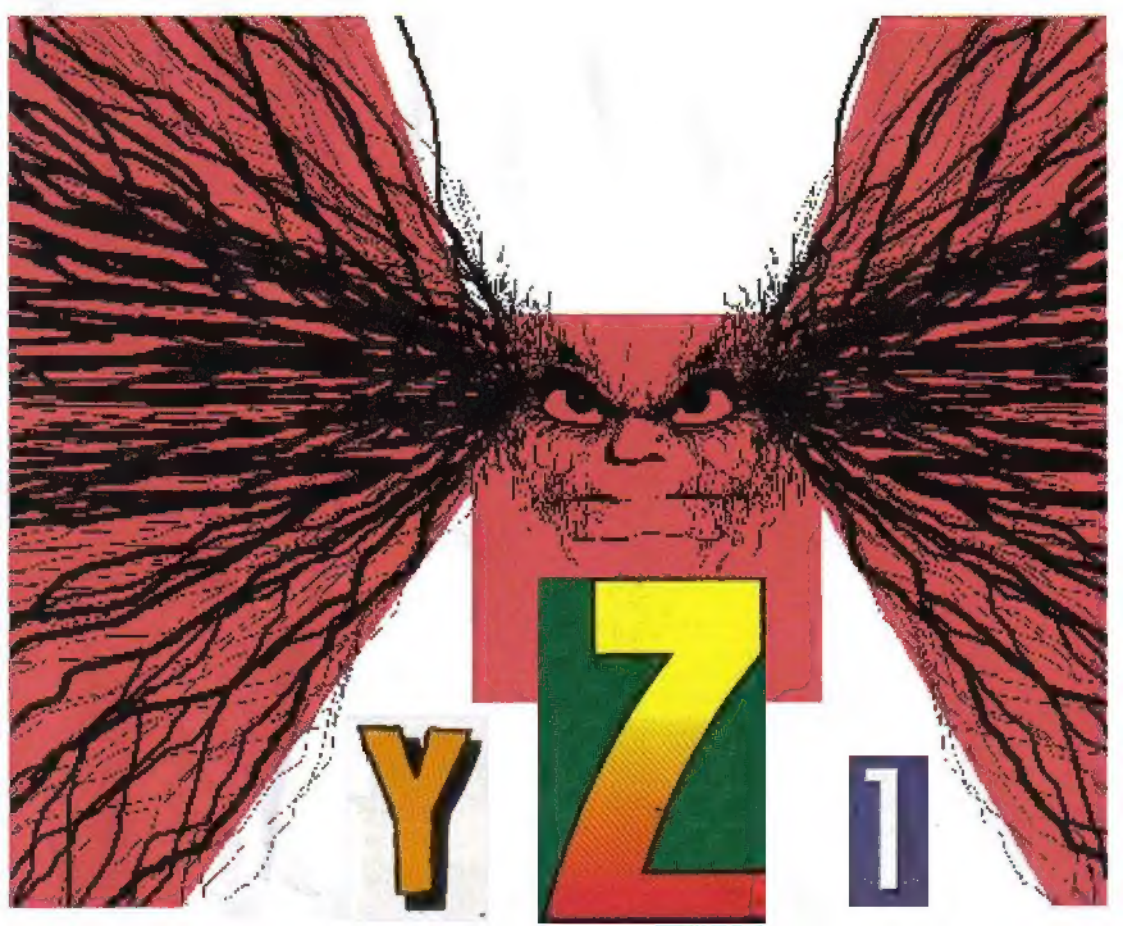
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